

Braille and Talking-Book Program Embraces New Braille Code

Unified English Braille Makes Print-to-Braille Translation Easier

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), part of the Library of Congress, next year will implement the Unified English Braille (UEB) code on Jan. 4, 2016—the 207th birthday of Louis Braille.

“This is the first extensive change to the English braille code, a major literacy tool, since the 1930s,” said NLS Director Karen Keninger. “The new code will be especially beneficial to students and other users of technology. It resolves persistent translation errors that occur when, for example, a student’s work is translated to print for a teacher to read, or when print material is translated to braille.” Those who use computers, smartphones, e-books and texting features will find it very useful.

The code, which has been adopted by seven other English-speaking countries, brings the braille code into the computer age. “UEB is not much different from the English Braille American Edition that we’ve been using,” Keninger said. UEB uses the same six-dot cell pattern as the present code, but drops some contractions, uses different spacing rules and allows for transliterating a wider array of symbols.

The Braille Authority of North America (BANA)—which oversees the use, teaching and production of braille in the United States—adopted the code in November 2012. It then began preparing constituents for the change to ensure implementation in 2016. “Since many BANA members produce braille or transcribe braille, the NLS announcement will not be a surprise. They have already been preparing,” said Judy Dixon, NLS consumer relations officer and NLS representative to BANA.

Beginning Jan. 4, 2016, all books added to the braille collection will be produced in UEB. “Current patrons should make the transition easily as the new code builds on the old system,” said Keninger. Existing braille books will remain in the collection and be available. The UEB books are not expected to be available from the collection for at least six months. Patrons will not need to change their equipment.

NLS administers the braille and talking-book program, a free library service available to U.S. residents and American citizens living abroad whose low vision, blindness or physical disability makes reading regular materials difficult. Through its national network of libraries, NLS mails books and magazines in audio and braille formats and digital audio equipment directly to enrollees at no cost. Music instructional materials are also available. Selected materials may be downloaded. For more information, visit www.loc.gov/nls/ or call 1-888-NLS-READ (1-888-657-7323).